

Message Text

SECRET

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22

ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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R 041732Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY RABAT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9390

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

S E C R E T RABAT 4230

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SS, AG, MO, MR

SUBJECT: SAHARA: NO IMMINENT HOSTILITIES SEEN FROM RABAT

REF: ALGIERS 1899

1. IT IS TRUE THAT TENDENCY TO DIG IN SOMEWHAT HAS BECOME MORE PRONOUNCED HERE IN WAKE OF PORT LOUIS SETBACKS TO GOM'S SAHARA POSITION. KING'S JULY 8 SPEECH (RABAT 3707) CLEARLY REFLECTED A SAHARA-CENTERED PSYCHOLOGICAL AND ECONOMIC BELT-TIGHTENING GEARED TO THE MONTHS AHEAD. EFFECT OF ANY FURTHER DIPLOMATIC SETBACKS, SERIOUS MILITARY INCIDENTS, OR CONTINUED WORSENING OF ECONOMIC SITUATION WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY INCREASE THIS TENDENCY. MOROCCO WILL IN ANY CASE SUBMIT TO SETBACKS IN SOME IF NOT ALL OF THE AFOREMENTIONED AREAS. THUS, WE AGREE THAT PROGNOSIS IS FOR INCREASING TENSIONS RESULTING AT LEAST IN PART FROM MOROCCAN FRUSTRATIONS.

2. FROM HERE, HOWEVER, WE DO NOT SEE DANGER OF IMMINENT HOSTILITIES, AT LEAST NOT INITIATED BY MOROCCO. ON THE CONTRARY, WE HAVE REPORTS OF STATEMENTS FROM MOROCCAN OFFICERS, HIGH AND LOW, THAT THE ARMED FORCES ARE NOT NOW PREPARED FOR A CONVENTIONAL WAR WITH ALGERIA, ALTHOUGH MOROCCO

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COULD GIVE A GOOD ACCOUNT OF DEFENDING ITSELF. OUR REPORTING

FROM ALL SOURCES AND ANALYSIS INDICATES THAT THIS IS SO. THE MOROCCAN ARMED FORCES ARE SERIOUSLY DEFICIENT IN AIR POWER AND ARMOR VIS-A-VIS THE ALGERIANS. JUST A FEW MONTHS AGO THE MOROCCAN ARMY HAD TO DEACTIVATE TEN HASTILY-FORMED RESERVE INFANTRY BATTALIONS, MOST OF WHICH WERE LOCATED IN THE EASTERN ZONE, BECAUSE THERE WERE NOT ENOUGH OFFICERS TO MAN THESE UNITS. MORE RECENTLY, THERE HAVE BEEN WIDESPREAD COMMAND CHANGES INVOLVING MORE THAN HALF OF THE ARMY'S COMBAT BATTALIONS. LIKEWISE, UNTESTED TROOPS ARE SCHEDULED TO BE ROTATED INTO THE SAHARA BEFORE THE COMMENCEMENT OF RAMADAN, APPROXIMATELY 26 AUGUST. THESE DO NOT APPEAR TO BE LOGICAL UNDERTAKINGS FOR A GOVERNMENT THAT IS ABOUT TO TAKE THE PLUNGE. FRENCH MILITARY AGREE WITH OUR ANALYSIS AND SAY THE MOROCCANS ARE BUYING TIME.

3. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT MOROCCO WILL RISK AN ALL OUT WAR, EXCEPT AS A LAST RESORT. A MORE LIKELY COURSE OF ACTION IS TO EMPLOY GUERRILLAS AGAINST ALGERIA WHILE DISCLAIMING RESPONSIBILITY FOR SUCH ACTIONS.

4. WE REMAIN CONVINCED THAT US SHOULD NOT UNDERTAKE MEDIATOR'S ROLE IN THIS DISPUTE. WHILE TENSION IN REGION IS CLEARLY NOT IN US INTERESTS, IN OUR VIEW ANIMOSITY AND LACK OF GOODWILL BETWEEN TWO PARTIES MAKES UNDERTAKING VIRTUAL SURE LOSER, AS NUMEROUS THIRD PARTIES HAVE LEARNED.

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